

**Testimony of Eileen M. Healy**  
**Independence Northwest: Center for Independent Living of Northwest CT, Inc.**  
**February 17, 2012**  
**Human Services Sub-Committee of Appropriations Public Hearing**  
**Bureau of Rehabilitative Services Budget**

Good Evening, my name is Eileen Healy and I live in Woodbury. I've been appointed by the Governor to represent CT's Independent Living Centers on the Statewide Independent Living Council, and I've also been the Executive Director of an Independent Living Center, Independence Northwest in Naugatuck, for over 23 years. I'm here tonight to implore you to continue fully funding CT's five Independent Living Centers.

CT's Independent Living Centers provide essential services and advocacy for people with all types of disabilities and of all ages. The staff of the ILCs is comprised of people with disabilities; that is a core tenet of both our state and federal mandate. We avoid unnecessary duplication of services by utilizing existing community programs, many of which are also facing elimination or reduction of state funding. CT's nonprofits rely on each other to meet the needs of CT's most vulnerable citizens and we are seeing more and more people with less and less dollars. The Independent Living Centers are one of the few organizations that seek to empower people to live independently in the community, to go to work, and to end unnecessary reliance on state and federal social service programs. Centers served over 10,000 people last year through advocacy, skills training, peer support and information and referral, among many other services. We teach self-reliance.

One year of state funding is critical funding for FIVE Independent Living Centers that serve the entire state. Centers have been level funded since we were established in state legislation in 1987. Any cost of living increases have only been reduced by rescissions and other reductions. Now, the Governor's budget seeks to reduce the centers' annual budget to \$273,669 from a high of \$665,000. The centers will experience a 70% reduction from our original full funding. The most recent proposed reduction will certainly result in reduced services to people with disabilities and will force centers to lay off staff at a time when we have an increasing demand for assistance.

State funding allows the independent living centers to leverage other funding streams including state contracts. State funding is used to support the Centers' infrastructure and core operations; it allows the Centers to provide cost effective and cost saving programs such as Money Follows the Person, Housing Opportunities for People Living with HIV/AIDS, Ticket to Work, Youth Transition, Aging and Disability Resource Centers and nursing home diversion - ALL programs that either save the state money or create new taxpayers. We provide these services more cost effectively because we maximize our state funds by keeping administrative expenses low. In Governor Malloy's midterm budget, the Department of Social Services highlights Money Follows the Person, reporting 876 people transitioned from nursing facilities back to the community. What's not mentioned is that this highlighted initiative is implemented at the local level through state contracts with the Independent Living Centers. Not only is transitioning elders and people with disabilities back to the community from nursing facilities the right thing to do, it also saves the state millions of dollars through the enhanced Medicaid match and in reducing institutional care. Despite the state's spotlight on MFP, the proposed budget seeks to save \$273,669 annually by reducing funds to the ILCs - effectively undermining the Centers' ability to save the state millions of dollars the ILCs create through the MFP. The savings created under MFP aren't being allocated to increased funding or even restoring funding for the centers, but that's another issue altogether. The unintended result of budget cuts to ILCs will be increased Medicaid and Unemployment Compensation costs, even greater reliance on costly state funded services and fewer people maximizing their independence.

The creation of the new Bureau of Rehabilitative Services (BRS) should have been a cost saving move.

Instead the new BRS has increases in its budget to support a new Director, provide administrative support positions, development of a cost allocation plan and to add a position to the driver's training program for persons with disabilities, for a total increase of \$667,800. The budget seeks to reduce these increases by cutting funding to JUST the five independent living centers and reducing direct services to people with disabilities. No other BRS line item has a proposed reduction.

As a person with a disability, I have been a recipient of services and a provider of services. I firmly believe in the Independent Living tenets of self-direction, self-reliance, self-empowerment and having choices. I live "independent living" every day. I work, I have family, I'm active in my community, I pay taxes and I vote. I want my tax dollars to fund programs, such as the ILcs, that give others the same opportunities that I've been given to be successful and self-reliant.

Please, restore full funding to the five independent living centers. The consequences of eliminating state funding for Independent Living Centers will increase state expenses far beyond the cost savings, and ultimately, it hurts Connecticut's children, adults and elders with disabilities.

Thank you for your attention and time.

Eileen M. Healy  
186 Saw Pit Hill Road  
Woodbury, CT 06798